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THE HORTICULTURAL HIBISCUS IN CEYLON.

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THE genus *Hibiscus* is a wide one, comprising some 150 to 160 species, of which many are known and grown in Ceylon. Chief among those of economic value is Rozelle (*Hibiscus Sabdariffa* L.) from the inner bark of the stems of which is produced a strong jute-like fibre. The succulent and fleshy sepals of the fruit capsules are also used by jam and jelly manufacturers for flavouring purposes and for pickles. The demand for these sepals, which are known commercially as " Karkade flowers ", is great and might warrant the planting of Rozelle on an extensive scale. Rozelle is grown commonly in Ceylon but always in small areas and in village gardens.

Other species of economic value include the *Bandakka* or *Okra* (*Hibiscus esculentus* L.), the young fruits of which are commonly used as a vegetable ; Deccan or Bombay hemp (*Hibiscus cannabinus* L.) a shrub cultivated for the fibre obtained from the inner bark ; Cuba bast (*Hibiscus elatus* Sw.), a West Indian bushy tree also producing fibre from the inner bark ; and the local *Bele patta* (*Hibiscus tiliaceus* L.), a small tree of the low-country, the bark of which yields a strong fibre used for mats and cordage and as a substitute locally for grafting tape. The Tamil *Perumaddi* (*Hibiscus micranthus* L.), another local plant, is according to Trimen a valuable febrifuge.

HORTICULTURAL SPECIES.

It is, however, mostly in the horticultural and more ornamental types of *Hibiscus* that the owner of a garden in the tropics or sub-tropics is interested. There are several species of value in this respect but those in general cultivation are confined to three or four species with their many crosses and varieties.

In Europe and America the *Hibiscus* types in cultivation are many and include annual and perennial forms. Most common is the Swamp or Rose Mallow (*Hibiscus Moscheutos* L.), which in Ceylon would only be suited to up-country gardens.

The *Hibiscus* types used in horticulture in tropical and subtropical gardens embrace few species but many varieties. The outstanding species are considered below.

Hibiscus mutabilis L. is a Chinese plant of tree-like form producing large pink and white double flowers 4 to 5 inches across with dull, rough and hairy leaves. Outside Ceylon it is known also as the " Cotton Rose " or " Confederate Rose " of America and as the " Changeable Rose ", due to the fact that the colour of the flowers of the creamy white variety often changes to a deep reddish colour with age. The double pink and white varieties in cultivation in Ceylon, however, do not change their colours.

The East African species, *Hibiscus schizopetalus* Hk.f., is a handsome plant and grows well in Ceylon but it is not so well suited for hedges as some others owing to its slender and elongated habit of growth. The flowers are pendulous, usually red to orange-red in colour, with the flower petals deeply cut and recurved.

The " Rose of Sharon " (*Hibiscus syriacus* L.) is rivalled in popularity only by the shoeflower (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) and in mid and up-country gardens the violet-blue form grows well, attaining a height of 4 to 5 feet in suitable soil and localities. This species has many forms with pendulous bell-shaped flowers varying in colour through the violet-blue, blue-purple, violet-red, rose and flesh-colour to white, and in both single and double forms. The varieties and forms, however, are more temperate to sub-tropical than the type and are very popular in America and the warmer parts of Europe.